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EPA Announces it Will Reconsider National Smog Standards

WASHINGTON – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson today announced the agency would reconsider the 2008 national smog standards to ensure they are scientifically sound and protective of human health. Smog, which is also known as ground level ozone, has been linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

“This is one of the most important protection measures we can take to safeguard our health and our environment. Smog in the air we breathe can cause difficulty breathing and aggravate asthma, especially in children,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “Reconsidering these standards and ensuring acceptable levels of ground-level ozone could cut health care costs and make our cities healthier, safer places to live, work and play.”

The reconsideration announced today covers both the primary and secondary ozone standards. EPA sets primary air quality standards to protect public health, including the health of sensitive groups, such as children and people with asthma. The secondary standard is set to protect public welfare and the environment, including protection against visibility impairment, damage to animals, crops, vegetation, and buildings. The Agency will propose any revisions to the ozone standards by December 2009 and will issue a final decision by August 2010.

EPA will conduct a thorough review of the science that guided the 2008 decision, including more than 1,700 scientific studies and any public comments from that rulemaking process. The Agency will also review the findings of EPA’s independent Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, which recommended stronger smog standards.

EPA will move quickly to implement any new standards that might result from the reconsideration. To reduce the workload for states during the interim period of reconsideration, the agency will propose to stay the 2008 standards for the purpose of attainment and nonattainment area designations. EPA will work with states, local governments and tribes to ensure that air quality is protected during that time.

Ground-level ozone forms when emissions from industrial facilities, power plants, landfills and motor vehicles react in the presence of sunlight. Scientific studies have linked ozone exposure to respiratory health problems ranging from decreased lung function and aggravated asthma to increased emergency department visits, hospital admissions, and even premature death. Seasonal ozone exposure has also been linked to adverse effects on sensitive vegetation, forests and ecosystems.

More information: <http://www.epa.gov/groundlevelozone>